

## ABSTRACT

### **Crisis in Capital Accumulation and the Trade Union Dilemma**

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Much has been said about the relevance of working class organisation in contemporary societies. Little has been noted on the increasing challenge the trade union faces in this age of global restructuring. Hardly any mention has been made regarding the crystallisation of the Second Industrial Revolution marked by computer integrated manufacturing and its effects on the workplace and society. The current dilemma of trade unionism in the Caribbean and elsewhere has been witnessed by many. Yet much of the current discussion speaks to a possible "resurgence", "strengthening" of the trade union to meet these challenges. The modern trade union is only a recent phenomenon in world history. It should not be viewed as an historically permanent form of social organisation for this not only is static but essentially non-dialectical. Is not the Second Industrial Revolution demanding (as well as a new techno-sphere) a new socio-sphere complete with relevant institutions/organisations? Does the neo-liberal strategies not serve to ensure that the region follow a development strategy that will pay respect to the law of value? And as all of these dynamics unfold, is not living labour losing more ground to capital in the labour process?

This thesis assesses the future of the trade union within the new strategy underpinning efforts at capital accumulation and casts doubt on the continued existence of trade unionism as we know it. Four main players dominate this discussion, namely, the working class, the union, capital/employer and the state. Although elements of the analysis include matters of industrial practice, modern industrial and political history, and ideology, I want to stress that the framework is provided by the deep class conflict between capital and labour. Here my aim is to describe the terrain of contemporary industrial class conflict and the strategic position of workers and their historic organisation – the trade union.

The anglophone Caribbean, United States of America, Britain Germany and Japan provide my main text. Interviews were held with labour activists, academics and 'ordinary workers'. As information and data were gathered from academic literature, local and extra-regional newspapers and other relevant sources, research points were presented at seminars where the public

was invited. Overall, I have been interested in understanding class conflict and not in simple empirical generalisations about the labour-management situation. It is by looking at the historical driving forces shaping social change on a world scale that the real nature of struggle facing the global proletariat both in the workplace and outside of it, was examined. As such, traditional trade unionism has not only been deemed inappropriate to advance the struggle of workers in this new age, but it has been argued that the union's accustomed role is being transcended by the requirements of capital accumulation today.